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THE LAST MEETING OF THE CONFEDERATE CABINET¹

Post cards may be bought in Danville, Virginia, in Charlotte, North Carolina, in Abbeville, South Carolina, and in Washington, Georgia, all showing a local building as "the house where the last meeting of the confederate cabinet was held." In Fort Mill, South Carolina, ladies' workboxes are shown made from the cedar tree under which this meeting was held, and the place where the tree stood is clearly visible. Each of these spots is cherished with the love of a patriotic people for its landmarks, and the accuracy of the tradition is maintained with partisan fervor.

To the historian it is a curious and interesting study to locate the place where Jefferson Davis and his official advisers held their last formal meeting, and if an abundance of documentary material is a safeguard for accuracy, the conclusion should be definite.

It will be advisable first to state the facts as they are known, then to decide what a cabinet meeting is, and then to try to determine where the last meeting of the confederate cabinet was actually held.

It is well known that it was on Sunday, April 2, 1865, that President Davis, during the first part of the morning service at St. Paul's Episcopal church in Richmond, received a telegram from General Lee "announcing his speedy withdrawal from Petersburg, and the corresponding necessity for evacuating Richmond."² A cabinet meeting was at once called at Davis' office on the third floor of the customhouse, and at this meeting there were present all members of the cabinet except George

¹ This paper was read at the annual meeting of the Mississippi valley historical association in St. Louis, May 9, 1919.

² Jefferson Davis, *Rise and fall of the confederate government* (New York, 1881), 2: 667. Davis had been told the same thing unofficially a half hour earlier by Postmaster-General Reagan. John H. Reagan, *Memoirs, with special reference to secession and the civil war* (New York, 1906), 196.

Davis, attorney-general, who had attended a different church from the one he usually attended and who could not be reached with a message till one o'clock, when the meeting had adjourned.³

This meeting, which resolved on the last steps necessary for leaving Richmond, was brief, as the situation was by no means a surprise and many of the archives and much of the property had already been removed.⁴ Those present at the meeting, in addition to President Davis, were Judah P. Benjamin, secretary of state; John C. Breckenridge, secretary of war; George A. Trenholm, secretary of the treasury; Stephen R. Mallory, secretary of the navy; and John H. Reagan, postmaster-general.⁵

Such of the archives as had not been sent a few days previously to Charlotte, North Carolina—whither Burton N. Harrison, Davis' private secretary, had conducted Mrs. Davis and members of the families of cabinet officers by a special train leaving Richmond March 31⁶—or such as had not still earlier, on March 28, been sent to Danville, Virginia, and on to Charlotte in the care of William J. Bromwell, clerk in the department of state,⁷ were now hurriedly put together and sent to Danville. Government officials, state officials, and a few private citizens left at the same time; the party arrived at Danville at three P.M. on Monday, April 3, having crept along at less than ten miles an hour, expecting capture every moment.⁸

Davis and certain members of his party were entertained by Major W. T. Sutherlin in his handsome home, which has recently been purchased by the city and is now preserved as a meeting place for patriotic societies.⁹ A commodious brick

³ "Letter of George Davis," in *Southern historical society papers*, 5: 124.

⁴ Stephen R. Mallory, "Last days of the confederate government," in *McClure's magazine*, 16: 99 ff., 239 ff.

⁵ The two officers last mentioned had served in their respective positions throughout the existence of the government.

⁶ Burton N. Harrison, "The capture of Jefferson Davis," in *Century*, 27 (new series 5): 130.

⁷ Walter Montgomery, "What became of the seal of the Confederate States of America," in *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, October 15, 1911.

⁸ A. K. Pollock, "President Davis' stay in Danville," in *Danville Register*, May 17, 1914; Mallory, "Last days of the confederate government," in *McClure's magazine*, 16: 102 ff. See also Davis, *Rise and fall of the confederate government*, 2: 675, for statement that he arrived in Danville early in the morning.

⁹ Pollock, "President Davis' stay in Danville," in *Danville Register*, May 17, 1914.

house on Wilson street, known as the Benedict house, then vacant, was placed at the disposal of the confederate government by the city council, and the reorganization of the clerical force indicated to the citizens the permanent location of the capital at this place.¹⁰

On April 4, Davis issued his last official proclamation, stating that the capture of the cities had simplified the military situation and that there was no reason to fear for the final outcome. This proclamation is said to have been written at the Sutherlin home, but Commissioner of the Revenue Joseph B. Anderson, who was then a printer's apprentice, says he was present when the document was written in the office occupied by the *Danville Register*.¹¹ It was drawn up by Benjamin and signed by Davis the same day in the Sutherlin home on a small table still preserved.¹² It was printed as a broadside and also issued as an "extra" the next day by the *Danville Register*, and was reprinted in the *New York Herald* of April 15, 1865—the same issue which carried the news of Lincoln's assassination. A local writer says that the last full meeting of the cabinet was held "in one of the sitting rooms of the Sutherlin mansion," but Secretary Breckinridge was not present during any of the stay in Danville. He had left Richmond on horseback at the time the presidential special left, but he did not join the Davis party till it reached Greensboro.¹³

To Danville, this new capital of the dying confederacy, John E. Wise, on the evening of April 8,¹⁴ brought the report that Lee

¹⁰ Harrison, "The capture of Jefferson Davis," in *Century*, 27: 131; but as to the intention of permanency see Davis, *Rise and fall of the confederate government*, 2: 676.

¹¹ Letter of A. H. Taylor, editor of the *Danville Register*, to the author, April 5, 1919.

¹² Davis, *Rise and fall of the confederate government*, 2: 677; also B. Boisseau Bobbitt, "Last hours of the confederacy," reprinted in *Danville Register*, April 13, 1919.

¹³ Mallory, "Last days of the confederate government," in *McClure's magazine*, 16: 105; Davis, *Rise and fall of the confederate government*, 2: 679. But Clark says that Breckinridge arrived from Danville a few days afterward. Captain M. H. Clark, "Departure of President Davis and cabinet from Richmond, Virginia," in *Confederate soldier in the civil war*, 318. A writer in the *Confederate veteran*, August, 1911, makes up a "full cabinet" by naming two persons who were not cabinet members and giving a third name incorrectly.

¹⁴ John S. Wise, *The end of an era* (Boston, 1899), 442.

was about to surrender; and, in the afternoon of April 10,¹⁵ official news of the capitulation. On the same evening, about ten P.M., Davis and the cabinet left Danville, as it was impossible to defend this city after Lee's surrender.¹⁶

Davis and his cabinet, except Breckinridge, arrived at Greensboro in the morning of April 11, having passed over one railroad bridge a few minutes before it was destroyed by federal raiders. On the same day Davis summoned General Johnston to meet him, and on the next day, April 12,¹⁷ a cabinet meeting was held at eight o'clock in the evening on the second floor of the house where Davis was entertained. All the members of the cabinet were present except Trenholm, who was ill; Breckinridge, who had not yet arrived; and possibly George Davis.¹⁸ There were also present Generals Johnston and Beauregard. The next day, April 13, another meeting was held at which Secretary Breckinridge was present, having arrived late on the previous evening with the details and the terms of Lee's surrender. Trenholm was still sick and was not present at this meeting, which was held at ten o'clock in the morning.¹⁹ At one of these two meetings, which Mallory's memory condenses into one, occurred the well-known scene in which General Johnston expressed his view of the situation, summing it up in one sentence: "Since Lee's surrender they regard the war as at an end." This opinion was concurred in fully by General Beauregard and apparently by members of the cabinet²⁰ who had talked with Johnston since their arrival at Greensboro. At the second and last meeting it was decided that it was useless for Davis, as head of the civil government, to attempt to treat for peace, but that

¹⁵ Several writers, including Pierce Butler, *Judah P. Benjamin* (Philadelphia, [1907]), 361, give this date as April 9. In the opinion of the present writer, the news did not reach Davis until the next day.

¹⁶ Alfred Roman, *The military operations of General Beauregard in the war between the states, 1861-1865; including a brief personal sketch and a narrative of his services in the war with Mexico, 1846-1848* (New York, 1884), 2: 389.

¹⁷ Mallory's date, April 15, given in "Last days of the confederate government," in *McClure's magazine*, 16: 240, is clearly incorrect. Mallory, writing in prison with no data except his memory, is also incorrect in other details.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*; Roman, *Military operations of General Beauregard in the war between the states*, 2: 394.

¹⁹ Reagan, *Memoirs, with special reference to secession and the civil war*, 199.

²⁰ Except Benjamin. See Butler, *Judah P. Benjamin*, 399 ff.

Johnston should make the preliminary overtures to Sherman. "A letter dictated by Mr. Davis, written by Mr. Mallory, and signed by General Johnston, was handed to the latter, with authority to forward it to General Sherman."²¹ This military conference appears to have been the only official business transacted at Greensboro, though Johnston, in a letter to Beauregard dated March 30, 1868, says that this conference on the morning of April 13 was "an hour or two after the meeting of his cabinet."²²

Davis and his party left Greensboro on the afternoon of April 14, and seem to have felt that the people of Greensboro, who Burton Harrison says "had not been zealous supporters of the Confederate Government," had not been hospitable in their entertainment.²³ This judgment was based partly on their general air of hostility, partly on the fact that all the party except Davis and Trenholm were lodged in the box cars in which they arrived. Davis was entertained by Colonel John Taylor Wood, just removed from Richmond, but he and his family were boarding and his landlord seemed afraid to allow Davis to stay in his house, lest it be burned afterwards by the "Federals." Trenholm, who was ill, was entertained at the house of ex-Governor Morehead.²⁴

On the other hand, General Beauregard, who had spoken of his delightful entertainment by the people of the city and especially Governor Morehead a few weeks before this, on this trip also maintained his headquarters in a box car to be ready for moving at any emergency.²⁵ He has given impressive account of his entering the president's car on his arrival from Danville

²¹ Butler, *Judah P. Benjamin*, 395; Mallory, "Last days of the confederate government," in *McClure's magazine*, 16: 242.

²² Roman, *Military operations of General Beauregard in the war between the states*, 2: 664.

²³ Harrison, "The capture of Jefferson Davis," in *Century*, 27: 132; Mallory, "Last days of the confederate government," in *McClure's magazine*, 16: 107.

²⁴ *Ibid.* But Governor Morehead's daughter says (*Charlotte Observer*, January, 1901) that it was Memminger, who was Trenholm's predecessor as secretary of the treasury, and also that Davis refused the invitation of her father "lest the Federal troops should burn the house that sheltered him for one night." As this account, however, goes on to say that President and Mrs. Davis (who was in Charlotte at that time) remained in their car, and also that Vice-President Stephens (who was at his home in Crawfordsville, Georgia, from February 10 to May 11) was at the Morehead home, it is evident that personal recollections at a late date can not be trusted.

²⁵ Roman, *Military operations of General Beauregard in the war between the states*, 2: 387.

and being "struck by the helpless appearance of the gentlemen there."

Harrison gives a humorous account of his struggle to get an ambulance for Benjamin, whose "figure was not well adapted for horseback riding." Finally, on the afternoon of April 14, the party started south for Charlotte with Benjamin, George Davis, Trenholm, and a few others in ambulances, the others, including President Davis, on horseback.²⁶ The first night was spent at a farmhouse, a few miles from Greensboro; the next, April 15, at Lexington, from which place Breckinridge and Reagan returned to go to a council with Sherman; April 16 at Salisbury; and April 17 at Concord. The next day the party entered Charlotte. Such is the account of Burton N. Harrison, Davis' private secretary. Mallory's account, written in 1865 while he was in prison in Fort Lafayette, New York harbor, and published in 1901 by his daughter,²⁷ says the party left Greensboro on April 16 and stopped in Lexington the first night. But one who reads Harrison's descriptions of the muddy roads and the struggles of the ambulances with Secretary Benjamin, Adjutant-General Cooper, and other fat men will easily allow more than one afternoon for the first thirty-four miles.

A curious instance of the difficulties met by the historian occurs in connection with this journey. Mallory mentions the party as spending the night of April 16 at Lexington at the home of Judge Barringer, and this error is repeated by Dodd, in his life of Jefferson Davis.²⁸ As a matter of fact, Judge Barringer lived at Concord and the Davis party stayed at his home and that of Mr. Allison on the night of April 17. But, to add to the difficulty, Mr. Paul B. Barringer, of the University of Virginia, has in his possession the illuminated copy of *Rasselas*—given him on his eighth birthday a few months before this—which, at his aunt's suggestion, he took to the visitors to have them write their names in it. It has on a fly leaf the autographs of Davis, Mallory, and others of the party dated "*Apr. 19, '65*"

²⁶ Benjamin could ride when necessary, and he did ride across South Carolina from Charlotte to Abbeville with his short legs sticking straight out but still preserving his appearance of being well-dressed—even if coat and trousers were made of an old army shawl. Butler, *Judah P. Benjamin*, 362.

²⁷ Mallory, "Last days of the confederate government," in *McClure's magazine*, 16: 242.

²⁸ William E. Dodd, *Jefferson Davis* (Philadelphia, 1907), 358.

in the original writing of each man. The only explanation is that in the confusion of the times Davis and the others mistook the calendar.

At Charlotte Davis and his party remained from April 18 to April 26. About two days after the party reached Charlotte, they were rejoined by Breckinridge and Reagan, and for a time, till Breckinridge returned to Johnston's army, the full cabinet was together. Here were several public establishments of the confederate government, including a "navy yard," which deserves separate treatment. Just as Davis reached Charlotte he was notified by a telegram from Breckinridge, who was with Johnston in his conference with Sherman, of Lincoln's assassination.

While the party was in Charlotte official meetings were held in the directors' room of Dewey's branch of the bank of North Carolina, where stands now the *Observer* building.²⁹ Trenholm was still sick at the time of his arrival in Charlotte and was at once taken to the home of William Phifer, and it was to his sick room that the other members of the cabinet came for the last meeting held here.

Mallory says: "While here [evidently April 23] Mr. Davis received the propositions agreed upon between Johnston and Sherman for peace, submitted them to his cabinet, and called upon the members present for written opinions upon the subject. These were called for about ten o'clock in the evening, when the terms were received, and the cabinet met him at ten the next morning, all present except Mr. Breckinridge, who had approved them and who was with Johnston, and Mr. Trenholm, who was sick in a private house in Charlotte. No comparison or interchange of opinion had been made, and yet their views were nearly identical as to the condition of the country, the character of the terms, and the policy of accepting them; and Mr. Trenholm, when called upon, concurred in the views of his colleagues. They were returned to Johnston approved."³⁰ This was April 24.³¹ On

²⁹ Mrs. J. A. Fore, "Cabinet meeting held here," in *Charlotte Observer*, April 26, 1915.

³⁰ Mallory, "Last days of the confederate government," in *McClure's magazine*, 16: 244; Reagan, *Memoirs, with special reference to secession and the civil war*, 202 ff.

³¹ Davis, *Rise and fall of the confederate government*, 2: 688.

the same day Sherman gave notice that the terms proposed were not approved by the Washington government and that the armistice would be terminated in forty-eight hours. This was communicated to Davis and a meeting was held in Trenholm's room at the Phifer residence. At this meeting, Davis says, instructions were given that Johnston "should retire with his cavalry, and as many infantry as could be mounted on draught horses," and the rest of the infantry should be disbanded to meet at an appointed rendezvous.³² This order, as is well known, was not carried out, and Johnston's surrender followed.³³ Davis' friends were advising him to escape from the country and it may be presumed that at this meeting it was determined to flee, at least farther south. Davis, however, was by nature sanguine—or stubborn—and as proffers of help came to him the idea came back again of getting together troops and trying once more.

Immediately after the armistice had expired, probably the afternoon of April 26, Davis and four, possibly five, of his cabinet rode horseback to the residence of A. B. Springs, three miles from the North Carolina line and three miles from Fort Mill, South Carolina. Attorney-General Davis had left the party at Charlotte to take charge of his family and did not rejoin the cabinet.³⁴ Trenholm remained in his sick room for several days after the party left Charlotte.³⁵ Davis and part of his company stayed two or three days at Springs' house; the others rode into Fort Mill and stayed at the home of William E. White. Here

³² Davis, *Rise and fall of the confederate government*, 2: 689.

³³ Joseph E. Johnston, *Johnston's narrative of military operations, directed, during the late war between the states* (New York, 1874), 411.

³⁴ Reagan, *Memoirs, with special reference to secession and the civil war*, 208.

³⁵ Davis, *Rise and fall of the confederate government*, 2: 689. Reagan and Clark say that Trenholm went about twenty miles with Davis, possibly to Fort Mill, and was compelled by his physical condition to turn back. Reagan, *Memoirs, with special reference to secession and the civil war*, 209; Clark, "Departure of President Davis and cabinet from Richmond, Virginia," in *Confederate soldier in the civil war*, 318 ff. Others make reference to the fact that Trenholm went as far as "the Catawba River." Fort Mill is two miles from the old Nation Road ferry over the Catawba. Colonel Leroy Springs is certain that one member of the cabinet resigned and turned back from Fort Mill. Miss Cordelia White Phifer, who is a daughter of the Mr. Phifer in Charlotte and a granddaughter of the Mr. White in Fort Mill, says that Trenholm did go to Fort Mill and on to Winnsboro and thence home, but her memory is that it was later. Letter of Miss Phifer to the author, April 29, 1919.

Davis came on the morning of April 29.³⁶ Springs had strongly advised the cabinet to separate to avoid capture. A meeting was held in White's yard under the cedar tree of the Fort Mill tradition. Doubtless Davis again agreed with what was left of his cabinet that only flight was possible, and the party moved on again, spending the next night, April 29, in Yorkville. Late the next day, the party left Yorkville and spent the night at Union. The night of May 1 was spent at Cokesbury. Leaving there at two o'clock in the morning, the small party arrived at Abbeville in the early forenoon of May 2. Davis was entertained at the home of his personal friend, Major Armistead Burt, the other four members of the cabinet at the home of Colonel T. C. Perrin. About four o'clock in the afternoon, on hearing the news that a body of federal cavalry was approaching the town, a conference was held at Major Burt's house. At this meeting there were present Davis, Secretary Breckinridge, and General Bragg.³⁷ To this meeting, called "a council of war" by Davis, were called the five brigade commanders, Ferguson, Dibrell, Vaughan, Basil Duke, and W. C. P. Breckinridge. "No one else was present."³⁸

Davis was again optimistic of success, but each member of his council expressed the idea that any further prolongation of the conflict was impossible. One of the officers—local tradition says it was Basil Duke—when finally asked by Davis if the soldiers would fight said, "Mr. Davis, they will risk anything for you." With some asperity Davis said, "I did not ask that, will they fight for the Confederacy?" Thus pressed Duke said, "Mr. Davis, they think the war is over." Various accounts of Davis' actions are given, but all agree that he seemed to collapse at this statement. Local tradition, again, says that Burt took him by the arm to assist him to his room. General Duke, who says ex-

³⁶ These dates are calculated as nearly as possible from Mallory, "Last days of the confederate government," in *McClure's magazine*, 16: 246; letters from Colonel Leroy Springs, Lancaster, South Carolina, and from Mrs. J. M. Odell, Concord, North Carolina; as well as from the local traditions of Fort Mill.

³⁷ Walter Miller, "Last meeting of the confederate cabinet," in *Blue and gray*, June, 1894; manuscript of Miss Hannah C. Perrin and letter of Mrs. George White, Sr. (daughters of Colonel Perrin), April 5, 1919; W. C. Benet, "Last meeting of the confederate cabinet," in *Abbeville Press and Banner*, February 21, 1917.

³⁸ Basil W. Duke, "Last days of the confederacy," in *Battles and leaders of the civil war* (New York, 1894), 5: 704, and Duke, *Morgan's cavalry* (New York, 1906), 4:38.

pressly that there was no one present except the men above mentioned, says it was Breckinridge who took his arm.

A daughter of Colonel Perrin, Miss Hannah C. Perrin, who was at that time a young girl, writes: "After the last soldier left (many of the soldiers were paid off here), father went into the library, where Mr. Benjamin was burning official papers. The latter pointed to the seal, which was lying on the table, and said he did not know what to do with it, as he could not burn it, and yet he was unwilling for the Federals to get it. Father suggested that he throw it into the Savannah, which he had to cross, and he said he would do it."³⁹ This, of course, was not the official seal, which reached Richmond just before the evacuation, was stored at Charlotte, North Carolina, for some time after the war, and after a strange adventure came into the hands of the Confederate museum at Richmond, where it is now.⁴⁰ Those who have seen the seal can hardly imagine its being carried on horseback for a week.

After using part of the coin belonging to the confederacy to pay off to a certain extent the soldiers, variously estimated at from 3,000 to 8,000, the party moved on to Washington, Georgia. Leaving Abbeville about eleven P.M., by hard riding they reached Washington by ten A.M. the next day, May 3, "crossing the Savannah River at Fort Charlotte Plantation, below Vienna on a pontoon bridge."⁴¹ From this point the party began to break up. Breckinridge remained with the cavalry at the crossing of the Savannah, came to Washington a few hours after Davis left, and afterwards escaped to Florida and Cuba. Benjamin bade good-by to the party a few hours later while they were breakfasting a short distance from Washington. He also escaped through Florida to the Bahamas and then to England.⁴² The next day after reaching Washington, Mallory handed in his resignation as secretary of the navy and that afternoon pro-

³⁹ Miller, "Last meeting of the confederate cabinet," in *Blue and gray*, June, 1894.

⁴⁰ Gaillard Hunt, quoted in Clark, "Great seal of the Confederate States," in *Confederate veteran*, August, 1912; also Montgomery, "What became of the seal of the Confederate States of America," in *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, October 15, 1911.

⁴¹ Miller, "Last meeting of the confederate cabinet," in *Blue and Gray*, June, 1894.

⁴² Butler, *Judah P. Benjamin*, 362 ff.

ceeded to his home in La Grange, Georgia. Reagan had been appointed secretary of the treasury after Trenholm's resignation,⁴³ and therefore he, in his two offices of postmaster-general and secretary of the treasury, constituted the "cabinet" at the meeting held the next morning, May 4, in the old bank building. This building has been torn down, but a room in the new courthouse building on the exact spot where this meeting was held is set aside as a room for "The Last Cabinet Meeting Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy."⁴⁴

Davis was again optimistic in his hopes of joining Kirby, Smith, Price, and others, and of continuing the struggle.⁴⁵ At this meeting, besides Davis and Reagan, there were present several officers. Again it was agreed that the struggle was useless, as it had been agreed at Greensboro, at Charlotte, at Fort Mill, and at Abbeville, and as doubtless it had been talked over in countless conversations, or "cabinet meetings," as the small official party rode on horseback across South Carolina. On the same afternoon, May 4, Davis rode out of Washington to be followed in a few hours by Reagan. Whether he and Reagan held any further "meetings" in the six days intervening before his capture is not recorded.

Before leaving Washington, probably at this meeting in the old bank building, Davis named Captain M. H. Clark acting treasurer of the Confederate States, and this appointment is the last official document signed by the president of the confederacy. The table on which this document was signed was long preserved by Mrs. M. E. Robertson, who entertained Davis on this visit.⁴⁶

Such are the known facts in regard to the actions of Davis and his advisers at each of these places. The question which was the last meeting of the cabinet still remains. In other words, what is a cabinet meeting? There is no authority in the consti-

⁴³ Reagan, *Memoirs, with special reference to secession and the civil war*, 209.

⁴⁴ Letter from Mrs. Ruth T. Irvine, Washington, Georgia, to the author, April 8, 1919.

⁴⁵ Mrs. M. M. Robertson, "Closing days of the confederacy," manuscript in United Daughters of the Confederacy room, Washington, Georgia.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*; Clark, "Great seal of the Confederate States," in *Confederate veteran*, August, 1912, p. 320.

tution of the United States or in that of the Confederate States, which in this section is identical, for a meeting of the cabinet. It is well known that at first Washington asked for opinions of each member separately. The first cabinet meeting seems to have been held April 11, 1791, without the president but with the vice-president.⁴⁷ Meetings with the president and all the cabinet, including the attorney-general, were held in 1792, possibly in 1791, and thenceforth regularly.⁴⁸ Newspapers of a few months since carried an item stating that a cabinet meeting was held at Washington without president, vice-president, or secretary of state. On the other hand, there is the fact that the president is the executive and may not be guided by the advice of the cabinet; and there is the well-known story, probably apocryphal, of Lincoln's announcing his dissent from the unanimous opinion of the cabinet in the words, "Seven nays, and one aye; the ayes have it." Clearly a cabinet meeting may consist of all or part of the cabinet, with or without the president, and is a cabinet meeting in virtue of its subject of discussion rather than of its form. It may have outside persons to give advice; as one instance of countless cases, the same *New York Herald* which carried news of Lincoln's assassination and of Davis' Danville proclamation mentioned a cabinet meeting just before Lincoln's assassination at which General Grant was present. It is difficult, then, to tell when the president talks matters over personally with members of his cabinet and when he has a formal meeting. There is no sure test.

As to the meeting of Davis' cabinet, clearly a real cabinet meeting was held in Richmond on that famous Sunday, a meeting with one member absent. And if the fall of Richmond was the fall of the confederacy, then this meeting was the last. But the confederate government considered itself as fully organized at Danville, and certainly held formal meetings of the cabinet, though again one member was absent. If the last appeal to the people by proclamation marked the end, then the meeting in the Sutherlin home at Danville was the last. At least it may be said

⁴⁷ Mary L. Hinsdale, *History of the president's cabinet* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1911), 12; Henry B. Larned, *The president's cabinet* (New Haven, 1912), 124.

⁴⁸ *Writings of Thomas Jefferson: being his autobiography, correspondence, reports, messages, addresses, and other writings, official and private* (New York, 1861), 1: 189; Hinsdale, *History of the president's cabinet*, 13.

that Danville was the last capital with organized clerical forces.

Reagan and General Johnston describe a cabinet meeting at Greensboro,⁴⁹ giving the opinions of each member, and clearly prove that a formal meeting was held, again with one member absent. It is true that the military conference overshadowed the cabinet meeting, and so far as the writer knows, Greensboro has no post cards of a "last meeting." As a matter of fact, there was nothing in any sense final here except the realization that Johnston could not hold out any longer.

It also is clear that formal meetings of the cabinet were held in Charlotte, with written opinions from cabinet members, as well as open discussion. It is also perfectly sure that the last full meeting of the cabinet was held here, April 26. It may also be noted that this was the first meeting with full attendance since before April 2. The members at this meeting undoubtedly spoke as the representatives of a government; as to those coming afterward, opinions must vary whether they were government meetings or the personal conferences of fleeing individuals. Davis considered himself a president with a government until after he left Washington, Georgia. Though at various times his followers convinced him that all was over, his confident nature returned to its conviction that he was still the head of a government. If his judgment is accepted, there were cabinet meetings at least up to May 4 at Washington, possibly later. As to the facts, Davis and a small body of men were fleeing on horseback from pursuing forces; now they were all together and planning for better things, now they were scattered in the woods to prevent capture. Why not "cabinet meetings" at Yorkville, Union, Cokesbury, or even at the lunch time which Reagan describes on the banks of the Broad river?⁵⁰

Fort Mill also claims on the recollection of its older citizens to have had the last meeting, and avers "that from here the cabinet separated," but if a formal meeting it certainly was not a full meeting. George Davis was absent and also Trenholm, unless we accept Reagan's statement that Trenholm rode this far and then returned sick to Charlotte.

What can be said of Abbeville, where even the seal was dis-

⁴⁹ Reagan, *Memoirs, with special reference to secession and the civil war*, 200.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 210.

posed of? In the first place this is the only town mentioned where it is known there was no cabinet meeting according to all official statements. What Davis called a "council of war"⁵¹ was held. By General Duke's express testimony, there was only one cabinet officer present, Breckinridge, and he not as a cabinet officer but as a general of the army. Breckinridge and Bragg said absolutely nothing; the council of the five brigade commanders decided the military situation. Neither Davis nor any member of the civil government alludes to any civil or government action. The reason for paying off soldiers and disposing of supplies was that the treasure had been sent here by rail, but the fleeing officers of the government were to leave the railroad here and federal troops were expected at any moment.

As to Washington, Georgia, did Davis and Reagan, in his dual capacity, hold a formal meeting? Mrs. Robertson, writing soon after the events, says there were present six officers whom she names "and many other distinguished officers." Such a conference can hardly be called a "cabinet meeting," but Reagan⁵² speaks of it as a "consultation with the cabinet."

Was there, then, a "last meeting"? Probably not, as a conscious, definite ending of things. By degrees the cabinet grew smaller, pressing exigencies of personal safety took the place of public plans, and gradually meetings ceased. If a definition is laid down that a formal meeting of the civil officers of the executive departments to discuss civil matters is a "cabinet meeting," then probably the last purely formal cabinet meeting of the confederacy was held at Charlotte, North Carolina, April 26, 1865, in the upstairs west room of the residence of William Phifer.⁵³

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⁵¹ Duke, "Last days of the confederacy," in *Battles and leaders of the civil war*, 4: 714.

⁵² Reagan, *Memoirs, with special reference to secession and the civil war*, 216.

⁵³ The local data for this study was secured by the assistance of Miss Susan B. Harrison, house regent of the Confederate museum, Richmond, Virginia; Mrs. W. P. Robinson, Danville, Virginia; Mrs. J. M. Odell, Concord, North Carolina; Mrs. J. A. Fore, Charlotte, North Carolina (who has shown genuine historical spirit in her studies of this question); Mr. Paul B. Barringer, Charlottesville, Virginia; Mrs. Ruth T. Irvin, Washington, Georgia; and Mr. J. W. Thomson, Winthrop college, who has supplied the local data for the events at Abbeville.